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A Power Grab In Moscow?

The keys to the Kremlin have never been the sure possessions of the Western world and in recent days a variety of seemingly isolated events have taken place which may suggest a zig or a zag in Soviet policy.

Four military attaches were searched in Siberia, the United States called off the prosecution of two Soviet spies, a West German de-bugging expert was gassed in Moscow, and stories have leaked from Washington that some administration experts see a resurgence of the KGB, the secret police of the U.S.S.R.

While the existence of two schools of thought in Russia has long been known to all, it has been assumed in the last few years that Khrushchev had the hard-line Stalinists completely under control, if indeed he had not weeded most of them out.

However, varied incidents point to a grappling for power between Khrushchev and the KGB. Supporters of this theory do not even rule out the possibility that Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President Kennedy with the knowledge and assistance of the KGB, while the Soviet leadership was kept in the dark. Oswald visited Mexico and while there in the fall of last year visited the Soviet Embassy twice. Seymour Freidin, executive editor of the Herald Tribune, said yesterday that the Soviet official he talked with "happens to be the chief of the KGB for North and South America."

While there is no direct evidence to support this theory, and the Warren Commission specifically disavowed it, plus the concurrent rumor that Oswald was a double agent who was actually working for the CIA in Russia, still doubts have lingered in a number of minds. It is our view that the Soviet leadership of the KGB would have nothing to gain from the assassination of President Kennedy — unless it believed that Kennedy and Khrushchev had arrived at such a working relationship that their purpose would be frustrated. This seems highly unlikely, but it must be remembered that Professor Frederick Barghoorn was released after the president intervened, and it is possible that the KGB picked him up without higher consultation.

The story of the searching of our military attaches is equally bizarre. They apparently behaved in a somewhat obvious manner, taking pictures and copious notes while on the type of tour that is seldom authorized by the Soviets. Then apparently, our embassy in Moscow cabled several pleas not to prosecute the Russian spies whose trial was taking place in New York. On the day that the trial was to open the case was dropped "in the national interests." There has been no explanation as to what caused the case to be dropped, particularly because the worst that could have happened to our attaches is expulsion from the country. The U. S. has the goods on many Soviet military attaches here and it would have been possible to retaliate in kind.

The West German bugging expert who was gassed in the shadows of a monastery near Moscow had been the bane of the KGB for a long time because he not only found Russian devices but so altered them that secret police members got a horrible shock when they touched their own instruments. On a number of occasions, he made fools of enemies. It was presumed that the Russians were trying to get him into a Russian hospital so he would be under their control, but Western embassies frustrated that plan by quick medical assistance to the injured counter-espionage agent. This affair may yet cause West Germany to withdraw its invitation to Khrushchev to visit their country.

Finally, it is the fact that the Soviet leader has been angling for President Johnson to visit the country after election. Thus, he would seem to have reason to promote reasonable relations, as indeed the President has political reasons for not allowing Soviet relations to deteriorate.

These are a few of the recent curious events that have given rise to the theory that the cold war may be taking another turn. If it is stretching the known facts to believe that the KGB had anything to do with the Kennedy assassination, it is not beyond reason to believe that the hard-liners may be trying to claw their way to power again — and that they are stepping on our toes to do it.